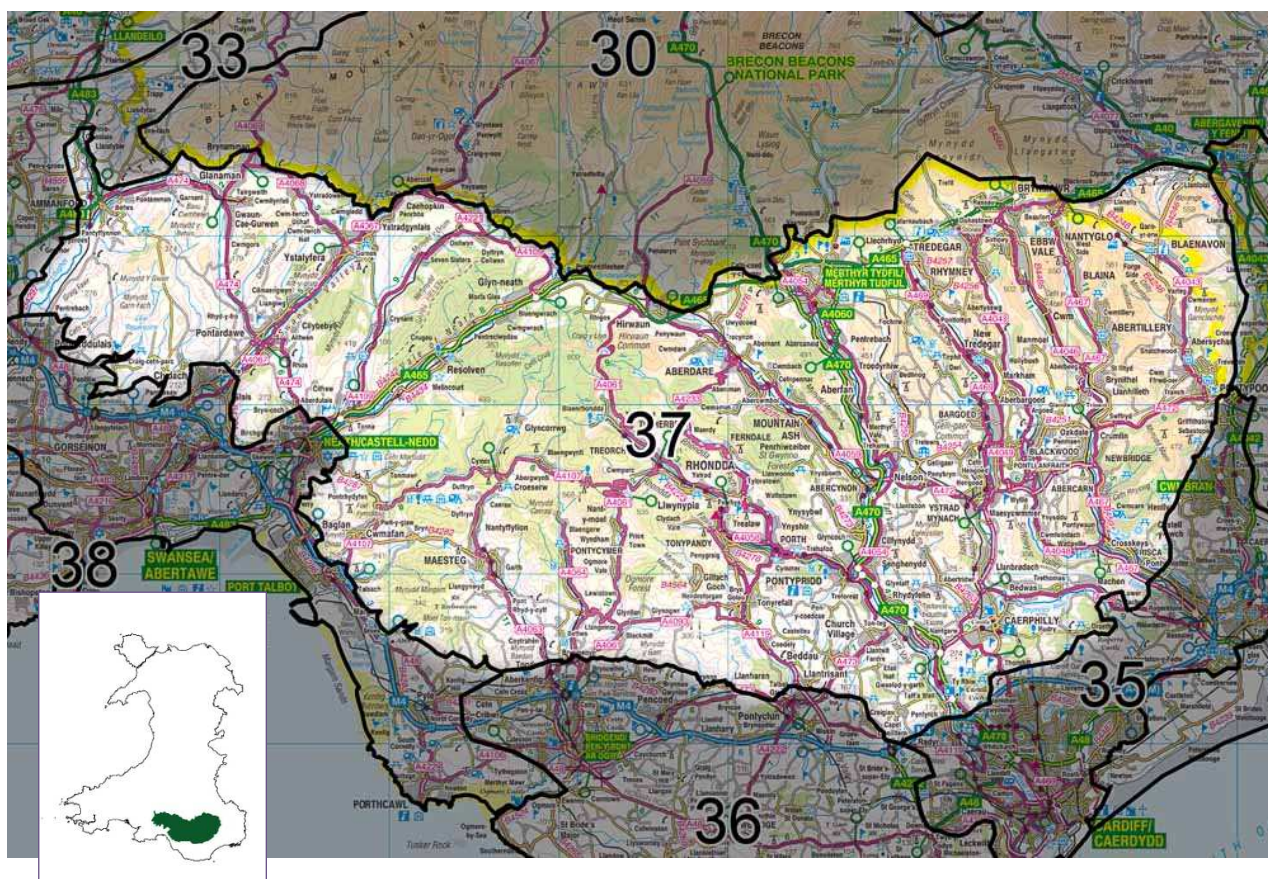


Appendix 4-1 – Landscape Character Assessment Extracts



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Cymoedd y De – disgrifiad cryno

Mae llawer o gymoedd dwfn, trefoledig yn brathu i fynydd-dir eang. Ynghyd â'r etifeddiaeth ddiwydiannol, a hunaniaeth bendant ei phobl, mae ardal Cymoedd y De wedi esgor ar rai o ddelweddau cenedlaethol mwyaf adnabyddus ac eiconig Cymru.

Mae datblygiad strimynnog yn llenwi llawer o waelodion a llethrau isaf y cymoedd. Ochr yn ochr â'u cymeriad trefol a diwydiannol, ceir dir bryniog dramatig, gyda llethrau serth, gweunydd agored neu goedwigoedd. Mae rhwydweithiau o reilffyrdd a ffyrdd yn cydgysylltu pentrefi'r cymoedd. Mae natur y tir yn cyfyngu ar dramwyo rhwng y naill gwm a'r llall, ac nid oes ond ychydig fylchau uchel rhyngddynt. Mae twrw a phrysurdeb llawer o gymoedd yn gwrthgyferbynnu â chymeriad cymharol anghysbell a gwyllt y llwyfandiroedd uchel cyfagos.

Darparodd daeareg a dyddodion mwynol yr ardal yr adnoddau a sbardunodd ymlodiad cyflym datblygu diwydiannol yn y 19eg ganrif. O fedru cludo ar reilffyrdd, creodd y diwydiannau glo, dur a haearn newydd seilwaith eang o adeiladau mawrion, ffwrneisiau, tyrau, simneiau, traphontydd, tomenydd gwastraff a lefelydd. Canlyniad cartrefu'r gweithwyr yw'r rhesi hirion ac eiconig o dai teras sy'n canlyn ochrau'r bryniau: ac yn sgîl y gweithwyr, daeth capeli, siopau, ysgolion a chyfleusterau eraill, gan greu cymunedau newydd, trefol eu natur. Canlyniad arall bywyd yno, a'r amgylchedd garw, fu delwedd cymdeithas wydn, radicalaidd ei gwleidyddiaeth, a hoffai chwarae rygbi.

Canlyniad dirywiad diwydiannol ddiwedd yr 20fed ganrif fu cau, symud ymaith, gadael neu ailddatblygu llawer o safleoedd diwydiannol blaenorol. Mae'r newidiadau hyn yn parhau heddiw, fel y mae'r newidiadau cymdeithasol canlyniadol ym mywyd a hunaniaeth y cymunedau. Gwelir yr ardal, bellach, yn rhan o "ranbarth dinas" ehangach a chynyddol ôl-ddiwydiannol, y fwyaf yng Nghymru. Mae delwedd eiconig newydd yn aneglur, ar brydiau, ond y mae gweithgareddau wedi'u seilio ar yr etifeddiaeth, mewn amgylchedd tynerach a gwyrddach, yn dechrau dod i'r amlwg fel rhan o hyn.

Summary Description

Many deep, urbanised valleys dissect an extensive upland area. Combined with industrial heritage and the distinct identity of its people, the South Wales Valleys provide some of Wales' most widely known and iconic national images.

Extensive ribbon development fills many valley bottoms and lower slopes. Their urban and industrial character is juxtaposed with dramatic upland settings with steep hillsides, open moors or forests. Networks of railways and roads connect valley settlements. Topography constrains passage between valleys, and there are only a limited number of high passes between valleys. The noise and business of many valleys contrast with the relatively remote and wild qualities of adjacent hill plateaux.

Underlying geology and mineral deposits provided the resources that fuelled a rapid spread of industrial development in the C19th. Once rail transport became possible, new coal, steel and iron industries created an extensive infrastructure of large buildings, furnaces, towers, chimneys, viaducts, spoil heaps and levels. Housing for workers resulted in the extensive and iconic rows of terraced houses that run along hillsides. Their needs in turn brought chapels, shops, schools and other facilities to create new settlements with an urban character. The way of life and harsh environment resulted in the image of a tough, rugby playing and radically minded society. But the decline of industries in the late C20th resulted in the closure, removal, abandonment or redevelopment of many former industrial sites. These changes continue today, as do the consequential social changes to the way of life and community identity. The area is now seen as part of a wider, increasingly post-industrial, 'city region', the largest in Wales. A new iconic image is at times unclear, but heritage-based activities set within a softer, greener environment are emerging as part of this.

While greenness is returning to some former industrial landscapes many of the new woodlands are coniferous. Waterways are slowly welcoming back fish, and mammals such as otters. The importance of wildlife conservation being undertaken hand-in-hand with economic regeneration is being recognised as one of the keys to the sustained revitalisation of this most iconic Welsh 'bro', in the Heads of the Valleys and Valleys Regional Park initiatives.

Key Characteristics
Extensive Upland plateaux – typically wild and windswept, often with unenclosed tracts, running roughly north-south as ‘fingers’ parallel between intervening deep valleys.
Numerous steep-sided valleys - typically aligned in parallel, flowing in southerly directions, shaped by southward flowing glaciers, leaving behind distinctive corrie ('cwm') and crag features. Major rivers include the Tawe, Taff and Rhymney.
Ribbon urban and industrial areas in valleys – in places extending up valley sides and to valley heads. The area is sometimes regarded as being part of a ‘city region’. Middle and eastern valleys tend to be the most heavily and continuously developed, e.g Rhondda Valley. The uplands by comparison have little or no settlement.
Extensive remains of heavy industry – with a mix of derelict, preserved and largely redeveloped areas, notably for coal mining. Preserved as heritage (World heritage Site) at Blaenafon this typically includes old railway alignments, buildings and former tips.
Contrast of urban valley activity next to quiet uplands – e.g. busy roads, new developments, traffic noise, night lighting, verses the adjacent wilder, remoter, quieter uplands.
Large blocks of coniferous plantation and deciduous woodland fringes – covering many steep hillsides and hilltops, most notably in the middle to western portion of the area, providing a softer contemporary landscape where there was once industry.
Heather, rough grassland and steep bracken slopes – dominate many plateaux and are grazed mainly by sheep. Much is common land.
Improved pastures on some lower valley sides - grazed by sheep and some dairy cattle.
Field boundaries - dry stone walls mark the boundary of common land while fields on lower slopes are bounded by dense hawthorn hedges, interspersed with swathes of broadleaved woodland.
Transport routes restricted to valleys – the intervening topography makes valley to valley travel difficult, except at heads and bottoms of valleys. Occasionally there are roads that climb steeply over passes with dramatic views and ‘hair pin’ bends.
Iconic cultural identity – many popular images of a tough, rugby-playing, religious, radically-minded society still remain associated with the South Wales Valleys, however today’s post-industrial, internet-connected reality is somewhat different.

Visual and Sensory profile

The South Wales Valleys is one of Wales’ more widely known iconic images, combining the wilder and often inclement upland setting with the heavily industrialised and busy valleys. Active mines and industry are now generally an image of the past, however the legacy remains extensively apparent today and together with the steep topography of the valley sides, has a defining influence on landscape character. Levels and old railway alignments, the generally reclaimed but sometimes still perceptible physical footprints of mine spoil heaps, the often intensively urbanised valley floors with old industrial buildings, and lower valley sides with their distinctive long rows of workers terraces, retain the traditional image.

Yet today a new image is gradually but fundamentally changing the old one. Modern road improvements and bypasses bristle with street lighting, spreading the urban influence beyond the old settlement envelopes and altering the character experienced when travelling. In many valleys the legacy of slow travel through the ribbon development continues today, but in some places and notably along the A470 north-south corridor and along the A465 “Heads of the Valleys” east-west corridor road, travel is now much quicker.

For those with cars, the area has become far more easily accessed and the once very separate valleys are now just a few minutes drive apart. The orientation of valleys and the remaining legacy of railways and roads focus travel towards Wales's two largest cities, Cardiff and Swansea, which lie in neighbouring areas to the south, offering the combination of upland valley living and city working. The noise of industry and railways has typically changed to that of road traffic. Many former brownfield sites have been redesigned and redeveloped for new housing, industry and retail. These modern features of the mid and late C20th provide an entirely contemporary character, tending not to style their architecture or pattern of urban design using the traditions established in the C19th. The results tend to lack local distinctiveness, however a 'Valleys' sense of place still remains strong because of the enduring historic and dramatic upland landscape setting.

It is a landscape of contrasts. The valleys contain the extensive ribbon development, which snakes along the valley floors and lower valley sides, and sometimes with settlements precariously extending over intervening slopes and spurs. The windswept upland plateaux that separate the valleys could not be more different. Devoid of settlement, the uplands engender a strong sense of openness and remoteness, although in places compromised by proximity to industry and people, for example reclaimed spoil heaps, fly tipping, abandoned cars, 'horsiculture' and associated ramshackle sheds or allotments, pressure of people accessing the area for recreation in an unmanaged way, and occasional pylon lines, telecommunications masts and occasional wind turbine developments. But the open plateaux afford extensive views across the valleys, southwards to the Severn Estuary and northwards to the Brecon Beacons. At times, views from plateau to plateau conceal the intervening valleys and thus visually connect more with the wider uplands of Wales.

The middle to western valleys are dominated by the extensive coniferous plantations whereas the eastern valleys, although generally smaller, are more intimate. On many valley sides, there are distinctive 'ffridd' and 'rhos pasture' mosaics of small fields, hedgerows, boundary walls, wet flushes and marshland, interspersed with small stands of trees, copses and woodlands. It is the vestige of the former agricultural landscape that once dominated before the expansion of coal mining and the iron industries. The far western valleys, (those west of the Neath Valley) have slightly gentler intervening hills and long, unfenced lanes use the ridges as convenient routes. This affects experience of the area too, as ridgeline routes are uncommon elsewhere.

Many former spoil tips have been reclaimed, with varying degrees of integration into the intrinsic natural topography and upland setting. In some areas much new tree planting results in a landscape today that is much softer and more enclosed than that depicted in historic images. Individual valleys differ markedly in appearance: Neath and Dulais are green and broad by comparison with the cramped settlements of the Swansea and the two Rhonddas; Afan is steep and mountainous, covered in conifers, while the Taff and Ebbw Vales are convoluted in both terrain and settlement.



The new landscape: Trefforest Industrial Estate, occupying the flat land in the valley bottom, and anchored into its setting by maturing woodlands and thick hedgerows. © Luke Maggs



Blaengwynfi, with traditional hillside terraces and new forestry on mountain sides. © Luke Maggs



Urban terraced settlement along valleys and valley sides, with many houses having been individually modified with render, new windows or roofs, extensions and colour. © LUC



Ebbw Vale from the western side of the valley. Contrast of urban, ex-industrial valleys undergoing transition, with the enduring open moors on the adjacent hills. © LUC



From Mynydd Machen, looking towards a prominent hilltop spoil tip. Most spoil tips have been removed, regraded or planted over with trees. © LUC



Heavy industries that once dominated the South Wales Valleys are largely gone, however their iconic remains are now the cultural heritage that informs today's character. Here we see the remains of Ynyscedwyn Ironworks at Ystradgynlais. © Luke Maggs



Pen Pych table top. There may be industrial remains and urban settlement about, but the dramatic topography, open moors and steep wooded valley sides provide many of the kinds of appealing scenic qualities that are more widely known in upland landscapes elsewhere in Wales. © Luke Maggs



Gelli Gaer Common, one of the long, open roads that run along the gentler plateau tops of the area west of the Neath Valley. © Richard Kelly



Terraced houses and old spoil heaps amidst the upland landscape: the traditional image as now preserved at Blaenavon (World Heritage Site). © John Briggs



From near the adjacent Brecon Beacons, looking down one of the upland plateaux that separate the industrialised valleys. Nantyglo is in the valley to the left, Ebbw Vale is in the valley to the right. © John Briggs



Brynmawr, one of the 'heads of the Valleys' settlements, with much C20th housing estate expansion. © John Briggs

Geological Landscape influences

The South Wales Valleys incorporates a large part of the southern-most uplands in Wales and is framed by the Brecon Beacons and Black Mountains to the north and the lowland vale landscapes to the south, east and west. The deeply incised valleys are a distinctive feature of the landscape. In the eastern sector the area is drained by a series of south and south-eastward flowing rivers including the Ebbw, Sirhowy, Rhymney and Taff, whilst the central region about the Rhondda is drained by the Rhondda Fawr and Rhondda Fach which are confluent with the Taff at Pontypridd. In contrast, drainage in the west is dominated by south-westward flowing rivers, including the Tawe, Neath and Afan. Ground elevations in the upland areas are highly variable, but in the north-east reach up to 581m on Coity Mountain and 574m on Cefn Coch. Farther west the ground reaches a maximum altitude of 600m on Garn Fach and 568m on Werfa at the head of the Ogmore Valley.

The bedrock geology is dominated by a thick sequence of Carboniferous sedimentary rocks. They are preserved in and around the South Wales Coalfield Basin, a structurally complex, WNW-trending trough-shaped structure that extends westwards into Pembrokeshire. The Lower Carboniferous sequence is dominated by a variety of marine,

limestone-dominated formations, together with some mudstones and ironstones, which form a narrow belt around the basin between Thornhill, Rudry, Risca and Pontypool, and north of Merthyr Tydfil, where the strata dip gently towards the south. There is a succeeding Upper Carboniferous sequence including sandstones, and marine mudstones and a succeeding 'Westphalian' sequence dominated by sandstones including the Pennant sandstones. The lower part of the succession forms the South Wales Coal Measures Group, and is dominated by mudstones, siltstones and coals arranged in repeating units.

The gently southward-dipping Pennant sandstones form an erosion-resistant cap to the upland plateaux of the South Wales Valleys, as well as a spectacular escarpment along their northern limit. Within the syncline are numerous minor folds, including the Pontypridd and Maesteg anticlines. Two of the most distinctive structures of the coalfield are the Neath and Swansea Valley disturbances which comprise NE-striking zones of folded and faulted strata that trend into the area from Devonian outcrops to the north and east. Both structures have a strong topographical expression, controlling the course of both the Neath and Swansea valleys, and are believed to root into major fractures in the underlying basement. The coalfield is also transected by a dense network of steep, dominantly NNW-striking cross-faults that frequently caused major problems during the extraction of coal. Some of these faults have a strong topographical influence as, for example, in the case of the Merthyr Church Fault, which controls the orientation of the Afon Taf Fawr in the vicinity of Merthyr Tydfil.

The area has been shaped by glaciation, where ice that accumulated in the Brecon Beacons and adjacent high ground spread southwards through the Pennant Sandstone escarpment and entered the coalfield, where glaciers incised deep U-shaped valleys. This southward advance was locally impeded by topography. For example, when the ice-sheet met the escarpment at Craig-y-Llyn (SN 910 039) it broke into two major lobes, one advancing south into the coalfield through the Cynon and Taff valleys, and the other west-south-west down the Neath Valley. Recessional halt moraines were formed on the valley floors as the ice melted. For example, in the Neath Valley at Tonnau and Cline, an impounded glacial lake stretched up the valley to Cwmgwrach. Throughout the area the principal glacial deposit is till (boulder clay) and most till occurs in the northern parts of the valleys, where it can reach a thickness of up to 30m. It passes down valley into outwash sands and gravels, which formed through the action of melt waters and created important landscape components of some valleys. A good example of a kame terrace is developed in the Afan Valley at Pontrhydyfen. Between about 13,000 and 11,500 years ago, small glaciers re-occupied the upland cirques along the north-facing Pennant Sandstone escarpment. These glaciers formed concentric ridges of moraine, often backed by marshy hollows and small lakes, as in the case of Llyn Fawr and Llyn Fach beneath Craig y Llyn.

Glacial deposits left on the valley floors have been progressively re-worked and re-deposited as alluvial silts and sands. River terraces occur intermittently, for example along the Taf Fawr, Mellte, Neath and Tawe, whilst alluvial fans have formed where steeply graded tributaries enter the more gently graded main valleys. Landslips form an important component of the landscape throughout the coalfield and occur on the glacially over-steepened flanks of the valleys where thick Pennant sandstones overlie weak and impermeable mudstones and rock masses were subject to failure and collapse. Whilst most mass movement took place during deglaciation, when the support of glacier ice was removed, some major landslips are recent, for example that at Bournville (SO 207 068) was initiated in 1893 and at East Pentwyn (SO 206 075) in 1954.

Landscape Habitats influences

The Valleys are characterised by upland areas incised by a number of valleys, with contrasting habitat to match. The bedrock geology has given rise to a variety of soil types. Basinal and blanket peats developed throughout the South Wales Valleys and provide an important record of post-glacial vegetation and climatic conditions. Loamy soils with a wet peaty surface characterise the sandstone uplands; well drained loamy soils are found on valley sides; while coarse loams subject to seasonal waterlogging are located on lower slopes and on valley floors.

Each valley has both unique and common features, such as broadly southerly flowing rivers fed by a myriad of smaller, faster flowing tributaries from the surrounding uplands. On the lower slopes of the valleys livestock-grazed, improved grassland bounded by hawthorn rich hedgerows is prevalent, together with linear stands of deciduous woodland – some of considerable ecological value, for example, Cwm Du Woods in the Llynfi Valley and Merddog Woods in the Ebbw Valley, which are SSSIs.

Further up the valley slopes, “fridd” habitat occurs, in which there is a distinctive mosaic of rough grazed fields, bracken, rhos pasture, scattered scrub and small pockets of woodland characterising the transition between the lower slopes and upland areas and important for a considerable number of species. At the tops of the valley slopes there is a gradation to more upland habitats, such as moorland with acid grassland and heath. There is also some contrast along the length of the valleys with their more southerly ends being more lowland in character and the heads of the valleys to the north displaying glacial features such as cirques (cymoedd) and crags, which support valuable communities. Particularly important examples are found in the Rhondda, for example, the rare arctic-alpine habitats at Craig-y-Llyn SSSI.

In between the valleys, areas of extensive plateaux are dominated by moorland vegetation of heather, blanket bog and acidic grassland formed on the wet peaty surface that overlies the generally loamy soils in the area. These moorland areas are largely grassy in nature and are generally grazed by sheep. Large areas of heath-dominated moorland are relatively scarce, but one such area of particular ecological value is The Bloreng, a mountain near Blaenafon.

Also present within the open moorland and hillsides are considerable blocks of coniferous plantation, particularly noticeable and extensive in the uplands to the north of Bridgend and Port Talbot, often of lower ecological importance and much has been planted in the C20th, some over reclaimed industrial workings.

Along the southern edge of the area, the land is lower lying with less steep and deep valleys, with the areas between the valleys being largely dominated by improved grassland. Deciduous woodland areas scattered throughout the area provide some ecological interest, as do the hedgerows that bound the fields. The two most notable woodland areas are associated with the more lowland valley slopes, being the oak woodlands at Park Mill and the beech woodlands just north of Cardiff, both of which are SAC and SSSIs. Some areas of semi-improved and marshy grassland are also present between the valleys, some of which are of considerable ecological value, most notably Llantrisant Common and Aberbargoed Grasslands

Historic Landscape influences

The Valleys reflect their coal mining and iron extraction and smelting heritage. The iron industry provided the spur for the rapid industrialisation of the whole area from c.1800. The foundation for all of this is the particular geology and land-form that provided all the materials needed for iron making in relatively accessible form. The linked exploitation of these materials and the transport systems leading to and from major works structures shaped the industrial landscape.

Long rows of former 19th century miners' terraces of stone, brick and coloured render are particularly distinctive, extending in some areas up very steep slopes and seen against a backdrop of bracken or conifers higher up the valley sides. Although the terraced house is identified as the most distinctive ingredient of settlement, in practice there is considerable variety in settlement type, including informal 'squatter' developments, planned company settlements, expanded early nuclei (Pontypool) and the developed industrial town built by many agencies but acquiring a coherent social landscape nonetheless (Blaenavon). Settlements developed either directly associated with particular industrial enterprises, or as service towns for a wider hinterland (Pontypridd). These varied histories contribute to considerable variety in present character both between and within valleys.

An often overlooked feature of the enormous manpower and economic energy of 200 years of toil are the canals dug to carry iron ore and coal from inland workings. The most prominent in terms of survival and landscape influence in this area are the Glamorgan from Merthyr to Cardiff, the Neath and Tennant Canals and that in the Swansea Valley.

Blaenavon is designated as a World Heritage Site as being one of the best surviving examples in the region of a valley head industrial community, with features from the C18th iron industry as well as the extensive coal mining activity that took place in the 19th century.

The upland plateaux are largely free from modern development aside from minor roads which cross the open commons. As a result, archaeological evidence of ancient human occupation and activity is often well preserved. Notable examples are Gelli-gaer Common near Ystrad Mynach, and Margam Mountain. The former area contains a rich diversity of archaeological sites, including Bronze Age burial and ritual monuments, a Roman road and military installations, and Capel Gwladys – an early church site. Later features include Mediaeval deserted settlements, an earthwork castle (Twyn Castle), field systems and platform houses. Margam Mountain stands above the east-west Roman road, and is distinguished by not only possessing extensive prehistoric and Mediaeval archaeological remains over a very large area of high hillside and moorland, but also as having been grazing land for the livestock of Margam Abbey.

Cultural Landscape influences

The Valleys, are internationally recognised for the rich industrial heritage of the C19th. Massive development followed the discovery of steam coal in 1855. This stimulated a so-called 'coal rush' which, for example, turned the Rhondda into the most productive coal mining area in Britain. The population exploded from a sparse agrarian society into a teeming mass of immigrant workers from rural areas, from Ireland, West Wales, Somerset, Gwynedd and the Midlands. From under 1000 in 1851, the population rose to nearly

163,000 by 1921, occupying an almost continuous conurbation for miles – albeit with jealously guarded identities in individually named settlements.

Elsewhere, every valley from the eastern Lwyd and Ebbw Vale to the far west Gwendraeth there sprang up the characteristic images of rows of terraced company houses. The iconic headframes and coal mine winding gear, public buildings, chapels and Working Men's Institutes and other infrastructure, all squeezed into the previously rural landscape of the valleys to house the massive in-migration of workers. This continued through the C20th with extensive post-war council housing estates, and latterly private estates. The Valleys and their Working Men's Institutes produced many radical, self-educated politicians, for example Aneurin Bevan, visionary founder of the National Health Service, and Neil Kinnock of Islwyn. Their radicalism was largely founded on the appalling conditions they had to work and live in.

But the industrial decline of the 1980s, the loss of 'macho' employment, and the psychological devastation of the failure of the year-long Miners' Strike in 1984 have, for many, led to cultural changes that previously would have been hard to imagine by their once-proud communities. The Strike was followed by wholesale unemployment, and although regenerative efforts continue to abound, not all are successful, and not all touch all the people. The iconic coal tips have been systematically flattened following the tragedy of Aberfan, and the once ever-present pithead winding gears have mostly gone. Those that survive best tend to form features of tourist sites, notably with Blaenavon regenerating itself as a World Heritage Site. Despite efforts to find new uses for old buildings, some of which are architecturally magnificent, the majority continue to decay. The same applies to the proliferation of multi-denominational chapels, and the Institutes, originally the social and educational as well as spiritual heart of Valleys communities.

Regeneration and more recent estates, along with new small and large-scale commercial and industrial development tend to be linked to the modern road network. Although there is still an extensive passenger railway branch line network, with plans to improve, regeneration tends to be based around car use and opportunities for much longer distance travel than traditionally. The employment opportunities elsewhere, notably in Cardiff, result in crowded trains and commuting residents clogging up M4 interchanges twice each day.

In recent years, telecommunication masts, pylons and wind turbines have appeared across the plateaux in an upland landscape otherwise devoid of development. A remarkable feature in what are recognized as deprived communities, is the incidence of satellite dishes on the roof tops and gable ends of individual dwellings in workers' terraced housing. A prominent but temporary regeneration event was the Ebbw Vale National Garden Festival in 1992, one of a series across Britain. The site has now become a popular retail centre and in recent times. The derelict Ebbw Vale Steelworks was demolished in late 2005 for the development of socially and economically mixed housing and infrastructure. The Cynon Valley is notable for the plan to create a long, linear riverside park, while much of the historic heart of Merthyr Tydfil has been lost to residential estates of non-vernacular design and materials. Similarly, vacant lots in the linear conurbations of the Ogwr and Rhondda valleys have now been transformed into low-cost housing estates for those who descend the valley roads to the ribbon-development of business and light industrial parks situated close to junctions on the M4. In the mid-west, the dead-end, and once economically and administratively important, valley of Glyncoed is enjoying an economic renaissance as a leisure destination for mountain biking and fishing, with a newly built visitor centre and 'extreme' trails.

The linking of these new ventures with the rich synthesis of history and culture that permeates the area's landscapes and the promotion of much that remains untouched and attractive, is an important aspect in the regeneration this large and remarkable area.



Blaenavon, traditional terraces. © John Briggs

NEATH PORT TALBOT LANDMAP LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

Final Report

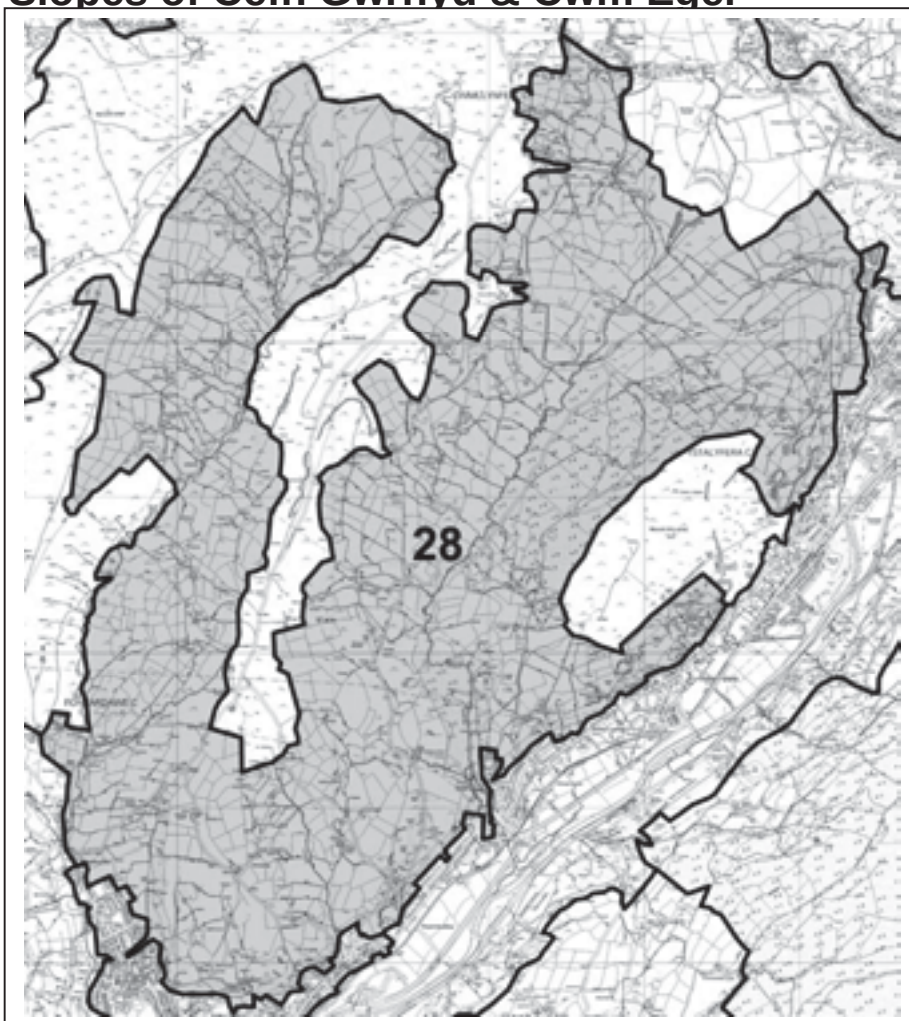
Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Countryside Council for Wales

December 2004



CHARACTER AREA 28

Slopes of Cefn Gwrhyd & Cwm Egel



Location, Context and Physical Characteristics



This area constitutes the rolling upland valleys of River Egel, Cwm Du and northern Swansea valley sides which range from approx 250m AOD below Mynydd Allt y Grug, to approx 100m AOD at Pontardawe.

The underlying geology is of South dipping sandstone in South Wales pennant formation (lower pennant measures), dissected by the Upper Clydach valley, Egel valley and Cwm Du valley; these steep valley slopes are covered with boulder clay at their lower extremes.

Visual and Sensory Characteristics

The landcover is predominantly grazed pasture with deciduous tree cover a significant element especially along riparian corridors. Many hedges are outgrown throughout the lower ground, leaving trees with fences as definitions of the field pattern. Walls are present on higher ground and these are also generally in poor state of disrepair. In the lower, more settled areas, there is a scattering of farmsteads and around these boundaries are generally more intensively maintained.

There are two large, regular blocks of coniferous plantation, which create a contrast to the grain of the landscape. On higher ground encroachment of bracken has occurred adding to an impression of reduced management. There are a number of disused mines and quarry workings scattered through this landscape, creating locally both disruption and visual interest. There is only one minor road which

passes through the area and numerous others that terminate at farmsteads. This restricted access provides a sense of remoteness to a settled and tranquil landscape.

Vegetation and Habitat Characteristics

The area is dominated by a landscape characterised as an extensive areas of rural semi-upland, which mostly conforms to the current concept of 'ffridd habitat' and mainly comprising rhos pastures. The area contains SSSI designated Gwrhyd Meadows, an extensive area of wet pasture and meadow with a Good range of flora and fauna including include marsh fritillary and small pearl-bordered fritillary.

In the lower reaches of the area the valleys a more varied character prevails as the valleys meet the Upper Clydach River. The valley of Cwm Du contains a major semi-upland wooded stream valley habitat, containing ancient semi-natural woodland on steep valley sides and dissected by small streams. At Frondeg adjacent to Rhyd-y-fro the neutral grassland, fen-meadow and related habitats present have been designates SSSI.

To the west the upland river corridor of the Afon Egel enclosed by narrow valley contains extensive and relatively undisturbed mire habitats on the valley floor. These areas probably support otters.

To the east Coed Cwm Du is designated SSSI. This valley runs in to the Swansea Valley, its course, lined predominantly with oak woodland, which contains the rare Royal fern plus other woodland wildflower including wood sorrel.

The woodland of Fforch Egel and Coedcae Mawr, areas of extensive conifer plantation, may contain many remnants of other habitats, especially acid grasslands, heathlands, rhos pastures and small areas of broadleaved woodland. This habitat favours birds such as crossbills.

Historic Characteristics and Cultural Associations

Although much of the landscape in general is characterised, by drystone walls dating from the mid-18th century, earlier interventions are evident. The church at Llanguig, radically altered in 1812, is medieval as is much of the fieldscape which surrounds it. Industry is limited to isolated, disused pits and levels; these are predominantly close to the open moorland and common land which fringes the area.

The uplands of Mynydd y Garth, which surround this enclosed land, have been described as one of the three significantly important funerary and ritual landscapes in Glamorgan. It is therefore unsurprising that Bronze Age monuments, in the form of standing stones and cairns, find their way into these rural valleys.

Key Characteristics

- Rolling upland valleys ranging from approx 250m AOD to approx 100m AOD.
- Grazed pasture with significant deciduous tree cover.
- Hedgerows are the dominate field boundaries on the lower ground, with stone walls at higher elevations.
- Tracks and single, minor roads provide access to a scattering of farmsteads.
- Extensive areas of SSSI at Gwrhyd Meadows and Coed Cwm Du.
- Two large, regular blocks of coniferous plantation have strong visual impact.
- Scattering of disused mines and quarry workings.
- Remote yet settled and tranquil landscape.

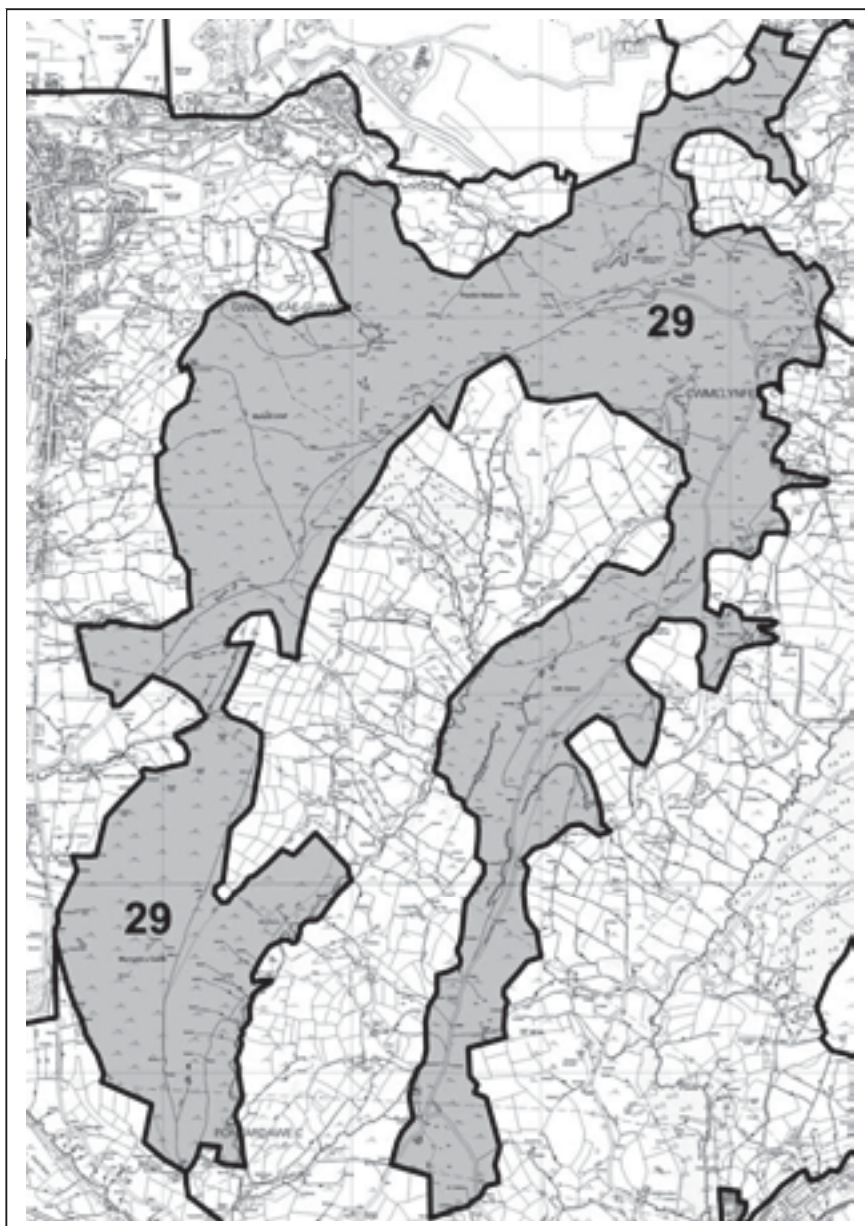
Evaluation

No	Character Area	Visual and Sensory Aspect Areas	Geological Landscape Aspect Areas	Landscape Habitats Aspect Areas	Historic Landscape Aspect Areas	Cultural Landscape Aspect Areas
28	Slopes of Cefn Gwrhyd &	67 - h	9 - m 10 - h	06 - h 08 - h 13 - h	41	44 - h

	<u>Cwm Egel</u>			91 - m 92 - m		
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CHARACTER AREA 29

Mynydd Uchaf, Mynydd Garth, Cefn Gwrhyd



Location, Context and Physical Characteristics



This is an area of open upland common on a plateau ranging from 357m AOD at Mynydd Uchaf to approx 150m AOD by River Egel, which takes in the high ground between Twrch valley and Cwm Gors. The underlying geology is of South dipping sandstone in South Wales pennant formation (Lower Pennant Measures) with underlying mudstone of Productive Coal formation.

Visual and Sensory Characteristics

This Common land is consistently covered in rough grasses, which are managed by sheep grazing. Occasional areas of exposed rock and cairns, break the simplicity of the cover and are notable landscape features. The mountain fence is a remnant drystone wall reinforced by post and wire fencing.

The area contains no settlements and only minor roads and tracks, which enhances a sense of remoteness. The exposed, open and simple character of the common contrasts with the settled nature of the surrounding valleys. This open and elevated landscape facilitates vast panoramic views to the surrounding landscape which can be enjoyed from the rights of ways and roads.

This landscape runs down into Cwm Aman and Cwm Gors creating an open an often exposed nature to the edges of the settlements, and providing a definite visual link in to the broader landscape.

Vegetation and Habitat Characteristics

This area is dominated by peat-based vegetation, which comprises of mixtures of dwarf shrub heath, mire communities, flushes and acid grasslands, interspersed with other features and habitats such as scrub, streams, bare peat and rock outcrops. It contains wet and dry heath, both recognised as being of international significance. These including Cefn Gwrhyd Rhdyfro a biological SSSI upland heath containing upland heathland including quaking bog and . These habitats facilitates a wide number of plants, invertebrates and bird species including skylark, wheatear, meadow pipit.

Historic Characteristics and Cultural Associations

The character area exhibits a density of primarily Bronze Age activity which has been highlighted as one of the three most important and significant funerary and ritual landscapes in Glamorgan. Survival of these funerary and ritual monuments, such as Bronze Age cairns and at least one Neolithic tomb is excellent. These monuments tend to be found located on elevated hillslopes and ridge crests, but not summits, with commanding views down into valleys or adjacent to water courses, a reoccurring theme in the funerary and ritual landscape of South Wales.

Post-medieval boundary stones are frequent features of this upland environment as are sheepfolds indicating the importance of animal husbandry during this period. The landscape of the adjacent farmland is characterised by boundaries of dry stonewalls; disused quarries are scattered across the lower elevations and almost certainly were exploited in the construction of these field boundaries.

This character area is of considerable importance for its density of prehistoric monuments, the presence of early industrial and agricultural activities, and for their setting in a relatively undisturbed upland landscape.

The Gwrhyd Welsh Independent Chapel built in 1856 was located in this exposed site due to its centrality for rural chapel-goers from the surrounding farmsteads. Today it acts as a significant local landmark and cultural feature.

Key Characteristics

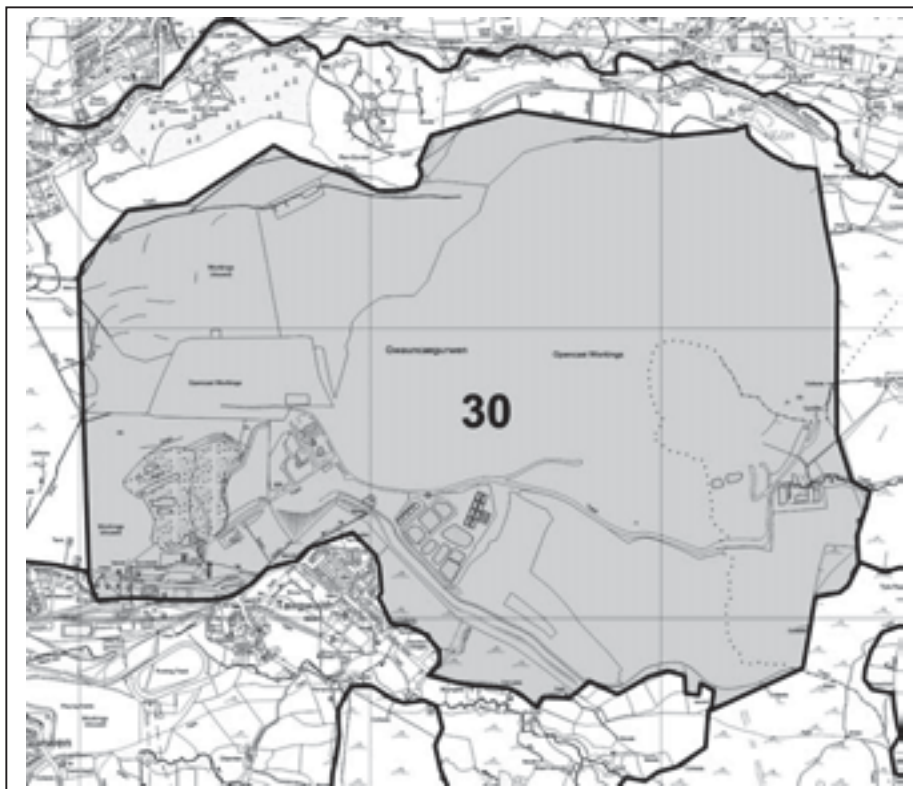
- Open upland common land ranging from approx 150m to 357m AOD.
- Simple sheep grazed landcover.
- Visual link from surrounding valleys.
- Mountain fence is predominantly broken drystone wall reinforced with post and rail fence.
- One of the three most important and significant funerary and ritual landscapes in Glamorgan.
- SSSI upland heath habitats.
- Gwrhyd Chapel.

Evaluation

No	Character area	Visual and Sensory Aspect Areas	Geological Landscape Aspect Areas	Landscape Habitats Aspect Areas	Historic Landscape Aspect Areas	Cultural Landscape Aspect Areas
29	<u>Mynydd Uchaf,</u> <u>Mynydd Garth, Cefn Gwrhyd</u>	39 - h	10 - h	3 - h 8 - h	29 64	44 - h

CHARACTER AREA 30

East Pit



Location, Context and Physical Characteristics



The East Pit opencast workings is located in the north west of the County Borough. It is defined by the extent of the working.

Visual and Sensory Characteristics

This expanse of disturbed/reclaimed land and opencast coal workings, have been screened by the construction of landforms clad, with decorative planting although, scrub and rough grasses are developing over time. The perimeter treatment and lack of public access prevents views into the site, yet auxiliary buildings, security fencing, roads and rail lines are significantly dominant features at the periphery of the area.

The area is generally a detractor within the landscape, its character being linked to the immensity of landform and continuity of boundary treatment, which provides only minimal sense of place.

Vegetation and Habitat Characteristics

The area represents a large dormant opencast mine, with adjacent areas of mine spoil, with remnants of extant habitats present in the area, which have gradually been lost to mining.

Historic Characteristics and Cultural Associations

Opencast workings have limited the survival of archaeological sites, Bryn-Llefrith post-medieval farmstead, immediately to the west of the eastern boundary, no longer exists; although some stonewalls and hedges belonging to the farmstead have survived. Other surviving sites include the remains of a colliery shown on the 1st edition OS (1885) located to the far north. A suggested recumbent standing stone belonging to the Bronze Age survives on moorland to the west, indicating a possible prehistoric presence.

Key Characteristics

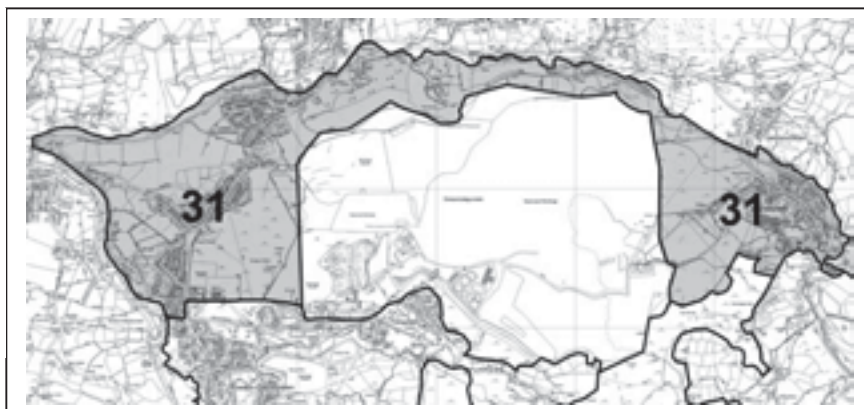
- Extensive opencast mining.
- Remnants of Habitats and Archaeological site persist.
- Screening mounds with decorative planting.

Evaluation

No	Character area	Visual and Sensory Aspect Areas	Geological Landscape Aspect Areas	Landscape Habitats Aspect Areas	Historic Landscape Aspect Areas	Cultural Landscape Aspect Areas
30	<u>East Pit</u>	23 - m 43 - m	13 - m	1 - l	53	43 - h

CHARACTER AREA 31

Cwm Aman



Location, Context and Physical Characteristics



This area of open upland valley is located to the north west of the County Borough, adjacent to the boundary. It takes in both the Cwm Aman and the disrupted landscape at the head of Cwm Twrch and ranges between 100m AOD to approx 200m AOD. The underlying geology is gently south dipping South Wales pennant formation, Hughes Beds sandstones.

Visual and Sensory Characteristics

The ground cover of the area is predominantly grazed pasture with increasing coverage of coarse grasses. There is significant riparian vegetation along watercourses especially to west, which adds a sense of enclosure, as do overgrown hedges which dominate where field boundaries are present.

The settlements of Lower Brynamman and Cwmllynfell are situated to the west and east of the area respectively, fringing the East Pit works. The core of Lower Brynamman settlements is difficult to define having a limited number of commercial enterprises. Although Cwmllynfell has a loose, scattered appearance its core is defined by the visually and socially dominant, landmark structures, the Chapel, new community hall and art gallery.

To the east of the area there is significant disturbance, where reclaimed land is evident in the valley bottom. Generally much of the area appears to be suffering from reduced management input, engendering a character of degraded upland grazing.

Vegetation and Habitat Characteristics

A rural semi-upland character prevails at higher reaches of the valley, this constitutes part of a more extensive area, which continues to the south. This landscape conforms to the current concept of 'ffridd habitats' and mainly comprises rhos pastures. It contains numerous BAP habitats including purple moor grass & rush pasture and upland heath. The latter habitat type is generally considered of international importance holding significant upland plant species. These habitats support a wide range of rhos pasture plants, associated invertebrates and the barn owl (LBAP).

Along the northern fringe of the area, a minor upland river dominates the character, however this has little direct impact on the character area.

Historic Characteristics

The industrial character of this landscape is evident in the disused mineral tramroads, levels and quarries throughout. Roger Hopkins leased some 700 acres

(280 ha) of coal at Gwaun cae Gurwen in 1837 and the following year made a start on the construction of a railway from his colliery (at Tairgwaith) to the Swansea Canal at Pontardawe. Only the first mile was completed before Hopkins realised that the Llanelli Railway would better serve his interests, then in the process of building a line up the Amman Valley.

Although much of the industry within the wider landscape was abandoned during the last century, and the landscape has largely reverted to its former rural character, infringement from East Pit works has produced a much more modern character.

Cultural Associations

The overriding cultural distinctiveness of this area is the presence of the enormous acreage of opencast mining that has encroached nearer to the local communities, and that (according to local people) is blighting their environment and the value of their houses. A social phenomenon is the conflict between wishing to earn a decent living close to home while still enjoying the environment.

The area has a high percentage of Welsh speakers at 70%.

Key Characteristics

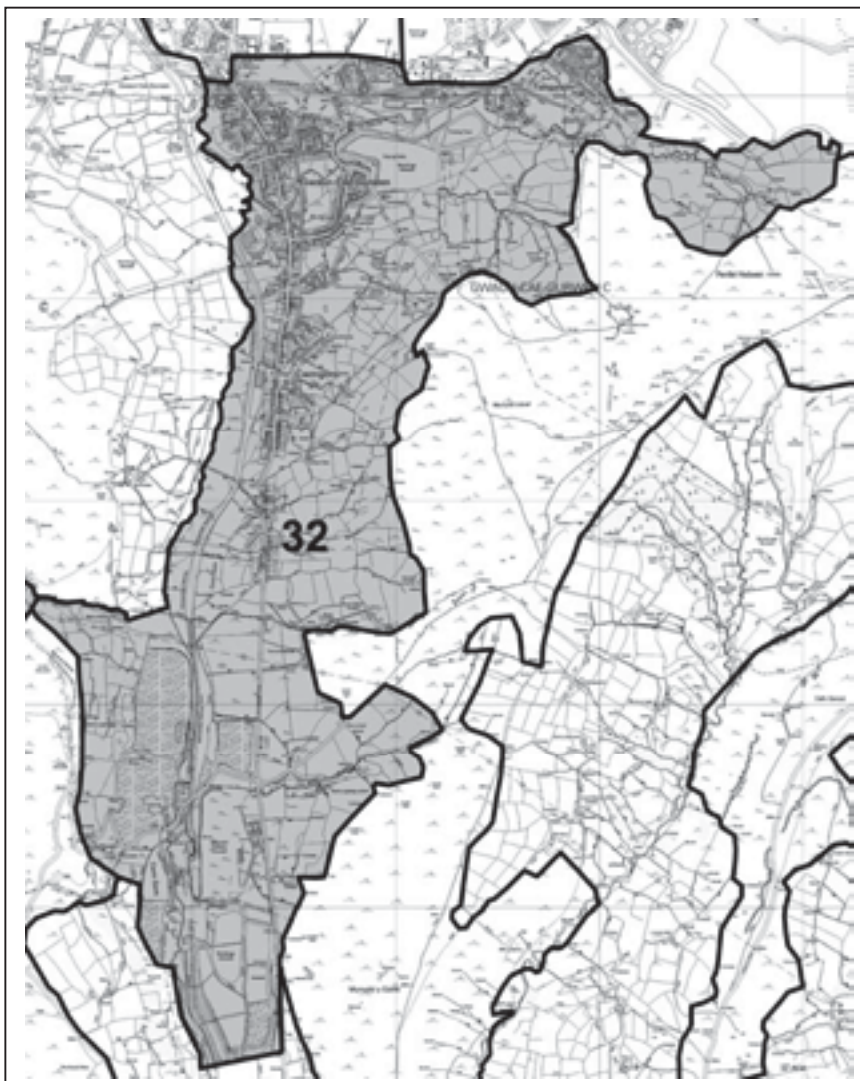
- Open upland valley ranging from 100m AOD to approx 200m AOD
- Predominantly grazed pasture with increasing coverage of coarse grasses.
- Fields enclosed primarily by overgrown hedges.
- Disturbance from opencast reclaimed evident infringement of East Pit works.
- High percentage of Welsh speakers.
- The Character of the Settlements of Lower Brynamman and Cwmllynfell is typical of forming mining villages.

Evaluation

No	Character area	Visual and Sensory Aspect Areas	Geological Landscape Aspect Areas	Landscape Habitats Aspect Areas	Historic Landscape Aspect Areas	Cultural Landscape Aspect Areas
40	Cwm Aman	33 - l 41 - l	13 - m	02 - m 13 - h 76 - l	29 41 53	43 - h

CHARACTER AREA 32

Cwm Gors / Gwaun Cae Gurwen / Abernant



Location, Context and Physical Characteristics



This upland valley lies in the north west of the County Borough. It is defined to the east by the open common land of Mynydd Uchaf/Mynydd y Garth and to the west by the County Borough boundary. It ranges from an elevation of approx 250m AOD above East Pit to 150m AOD in the lower valley.

The valley cuts through an underlying geology is of south dipping sandstone of South Wales pennant formation (Lower Pennant Measures) which underlies mudstone dominated Productive Coal formation. There is significant disruption through mining within the valley, and landslips are evident on the valley slopes.

Visual and Sensory Characteristics

The valley is predominantly grazed, with the presence of invasive bracken, scrub and coarse grasses signifying reduced management input, enclosed by outgrown hedges. Deciduous woodland is a dominant landscape element along riparian corridors and on the lower reaches of the valley sides. There are extensive areas of disturbance on the valley floor with old workings, landfill and commercial developments all acting as localised detractors.

The settlement of Cwmgors stretch along the A474, Tairgwaith lies on the fringe of the opencast works, while sitting between the two Gwaun Cae Gurwen is more nucleated in character. The cores of these settlements are difficult to define and have a limited number of commercial enterprises and with newer residential areas extending around the core. The few original buildings are a mix of stone, brick and render with slate roofs while newer buildings tend to be render and pebbledash.

Views are generally contained within the valley, by both the topography and tree cover, the latter of which screens developments. Yet from adjacent high ground the detracts are highly visible.

Vegetation and Habitat Characteristics

A rural semi-upland character prevails at higher reaches of the valley, this constitutes part of a more extensive area, which continues to the south. This landscape conforms to the current concept of 'ffridd habitats' and mainly comprises rhos pastures. It contains numerous BAP habitats including purple moor grass & rush pasture and upland heath. The latter habitat type generally being considered of international importance. These habitats support a wide range of rhos pasture plants, associated invertebrates and the barn owl (LBAP).

Running through the valley is the river corridor. This contains extensive areas of broadleaved woodland, including oakwood (BAP habitat) on some of the steep valley sections, areas of marshy neutral habitats (e.g. rush-pastures etc) along the watercourse and on drier areas, acid grasslands.

The southern extent of the area is dominated by an area of disturbed industrial development on former mine workings and spoil. Although this disturbance has deleterious impact on habitats, it has also resulted in the creation of secondary habitats, which are themselves of value. Many plant species, including a number of orchid species, are now to be found on old spoil sites, often in large numbers.

Historic Characteristics

Disused mineral tramroads, levels and quarries characterise the north around Gwaun cae Gurwen and Cwmllynfell. Roger Hopkins leased some 700 acres (280 ha) of coal at Gwaun cae Gurwen in 1837 and the following year made a start on the construction of a railway from his colliery (at Tairgwaith) to the Swansea Canal at Pontardawe. Only the first mile was completed before Hopkins realised that the Llanelli Railway would better serve his interests, then in the process of building a line up the Amman Valley. Work on the canal-linked railway was abandoned and Hopkins extended the Llanelli line to his colliery in 1840 (Hughes and Reynolds 1989, 38). Much of the industry was abandoned during the last century, the and significant areas reverted to its former rural character.

Cultural Associations

To the north of Gwaun Cae Gurwen, the overriding cultural distinctiveness is the presence of the enormous acreage of opencast mining that has encroached nearer to the local communities, and that (according to local people) is blighting their environment and the value of their houses. A social phenomenon is the conflict between wishing to earn a decent living close to home while still enjoying a decent environment.

The settlement of Tairgwaith also possesses evidence of how mining communities entertained themselves, with the trotting track on the edge of the moor, run as a business.

The community has a strong spirit of enterprise, focused through the efforts of Amman Valley Enterprises resource centre at Gwaun cae Gurwen. The area has a high percentage of Welsh speakers at 70%.

Key Characteristics

- Upland valley ranging from 250m AOD to 150m AOD.
- Predominantly grazed, with invasive bracken, scrub and coarse grasses.
- River corridor runs through the valley with significant riparian vegetation.

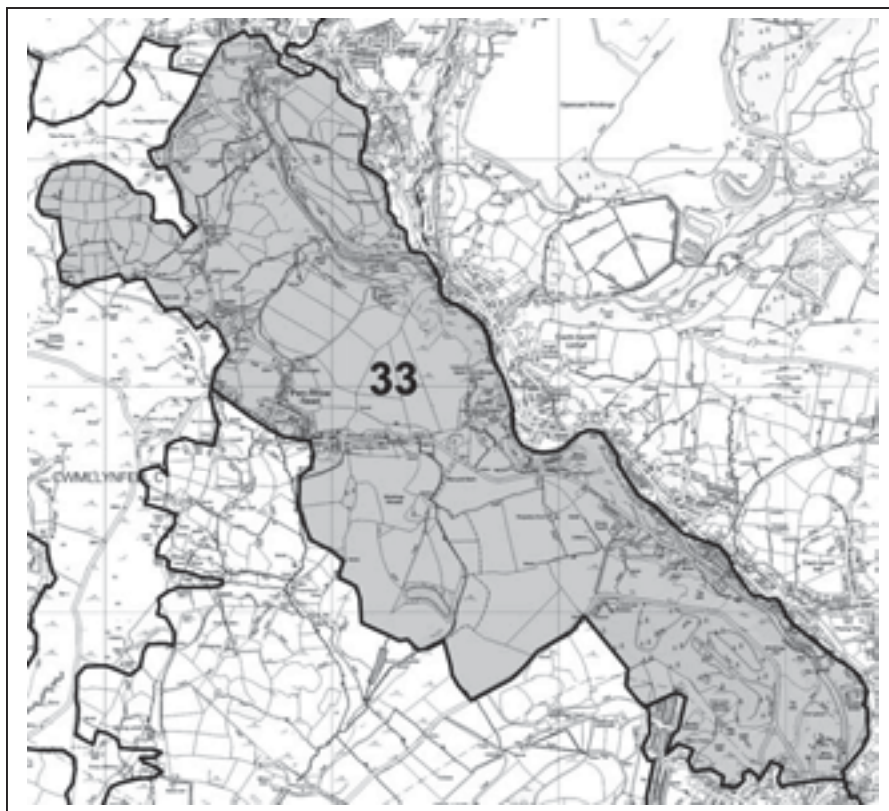
- High percentage of Welsh speakers.
- Disused mineral tramroads, levels and quarries and former colliery.
- Settlements of Gwaun Cae Gurwen and Cwmgors stretch along the A474 .

Evaluation

No	Character area	Visual and Sensory Aspect Areas	Geological Landscape Aspect Areas	Landscape Habitats Aspect Areas	Historic Landscape Aspect Areas	Cultural Landscape Aspect Areas
32	Cwm Gors	33 - m 42 - m	10 - h 13 - m	07 09 13 76	41	43 - h 44 - h

CHARACTER AREA 33

Cwm Twrch



Location, Context and Physical Characteristics

This area lies to the north of the County Borough and covers the south eastern face of the upland valley. It is bounded to the north by the County Borough boundary, which for much of its length follows the Afon Llynfell. It ranges from approx 280m AOD to approx 100m AOD on a geology of gently south dipping South Wales pennant formation, Hughes Beds sandstones.

Visual and Sensory Characteristics

The valley consists predominantly of enclosed upland grazing. The fields are contained by overgrown hedges, with heavy deciduous tree cover being a significant element, especially on the lower slopes and in the base of the valley. Old mine works through the area, has produced pockets of localised disturbance in the area.

The bottom within the county borough is relatively sparsely populated, with dwellings mainly focused towards the Swansea Valley.

Views within the character area are confined by the built form, topography and substantial tree cover, these elements also produce a sheltered and settled feel contrasting with the surrounding areas.

Vegetation and Habitat Characteristics

The character of the lower slopes and base of the valley are represented by a small upland river corridor, valley sides flanked by broadleaved woodland, which include areas of ancient woodland small. Interspersed are areas of neutral grassland probably trending towards rush pasture and localised areas of scrub and old mine spoil. It is suspected that Otters inhabit this environment

A rural semi-upland character prevails at higher reaches of the valley. This habitat part of a more extensive area which continues to the south, conforms to the current

concept of 'ffridd habitats' and mainly comprises rhos pastures. The area contains a good range of rhos pasture plants as well as the barn owl (LBAP)

Historic Characteristics and Cultural Associations

The character area lies below to Mynydd y Gwrhyd, described as one of the three significantly important funerary and ritual landscapes in Glamorgan, it is therefore unsurprising that Bronze Age monuments, in the form of standing stones and cairns are evident.

Yet the character area itself is linked to more recent developments with disused mineral tramroads, Levels and quarries dominating. Much of the industry was abandoned during the last century and largely the area has reverted to its former rural character.

Key Characteristics

- Upland valley ranging from approx 280m AOD to approx 100m AOD.
- Enclosed upland grazing, bounded by outgrown hedges.
- Significant deciduous cover through lower reaches contain views.
- Small settlements and dwellings line the A4068.
- Pockets of localised disturbance created by disused mine works.

Evaluation

No	Character area	Visual and Sensory Aspect Areas	Geological Landscape Aspect Areas	Landscape Habitats Aspect Areas	Historic Landscape Aspect Areas	Cultural Landscape Aspect Areas
33	Cwm Twrch	44 - m	13 - m	04 13	41	43 44